

# Licensing Applications Committee

13 July 2023



**Reading**  
Borough Council  
*Working better with you*

<b>Title</b>	Draft Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Strategy 2023-2028
<b>Purpose of the report</b>	To make a decision
<b>Report status</b>	Public report
<b>Report author</b>	Matthew Golledge
<b>Lead councillor</b>	Councillor Ennis
<b>Corporate priority</b>	Healthy Environment
<b>Recommendations</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. That the draft Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Strategy 2023-2028, as appended to the report, be approved for consultation as set out in section 6 to the report;</li><li>2. That a further report be submitted to a future meeting to adopt the final Strategy, having taken the results of the consultation into account.</li></ol>

## 1. Executive summary

- 1.1. The Council is committed to ensuring the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Sector remains integrated into our sustainable transport network to continue to move passengers to destinations safely, whilst contributing to the economy with minimal environmental impact.
- 1.2. A draft Strategy has been prepared setting out the council's overall vision for the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire trade in the Town (**Appendix 1**). The Strategy aims to set out how we can achieve meeting this vision and make improvements to the system over the next 5 years.
- 1.3. The Council has set out 4 key objectives which underpin the basis of the strategy:
  - **Customer focused:** high levels of customer service, accountable operators and drivers and a service which provides value for money.
  - **Safe:** the sector is trusted; passengers are confident in using the services and vehicles are modern and accessible for all.
  - **Clean:** the fleet is greener and cleaner helping to deliver services with a low environmental impact.
  - **Well regulated:** the Council has an effective regulatory framework to administer and enforce statutory and local requirements, to benefit both the trade and customers.
- 1.4. The Strategy sets out a number of key actions and improvements including how we plan to meet environmental objectives and a commitment to ensure full compliance with the Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Standards. This will encompass the ongoing review and amendment of current policies and the adoption of a cohesive policy document that brings together all procedures on taxi and private hire vehicle licensing.

## 2. Policy context

- 2.1. Reading 2050 Vision is an ambitious description of what Reading can be: a green tech city, a city of culture and diversity, and a city of rivers and parks. The vision identifies key elements for its delivery, including a number in which transport plays a major part. Transport will be critical to enhancing the connectivity needed to facilitate economic growth and enable everyone to enjoy the multitude of assets the town has to offer. The way in which we deliver this will be key to low carbon living and creating the green and healthy spaces to allow our communities to thrive. Technology will support our transport network, facilitating smart and efficient solutions, and maximising the impact that transport can make.
- 2.2 Following the Council's declaration of a Climate Emergency, the Climate Change Partnership developed "The Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25". This set out priorities on the pathway to net zero for transport. The main aims are for a low carbon future for transport in which emissions are cut by reducing the need to travel by more polluting modes of transport, shifting more journeys to sustainable modes of transport and supporting the transition from petrol/diesel to electric vehicles. In the process, this will improve health and wellbeing, while making transport infrastructure more resilient to climate impacts.
- 2.3 The Reading Transport Strategy 2040 (Local Transport Plan) outlines the high-level policy and strategy for transport to meet existing and future transport demand in the town to 2040.

The plan sets out key commitments with regards the taxi and PHV trade:

- The Council seeks to ensure that providers of taxi and private hire services adhere to the quality obligations set out in the relevant licences and are compliant with all relevant guidance on the conditions that arise from the application of the appropriate sections of legislation.
- The Council can revoke taxi and private hire licences if the licence holder does not meet their obligations. A penalty points system is in place for breaches of regulations, as set out in the licence holder handbook. Through these mechanisms, we will continue to work with taxi and private hire providers to deliver high-quality and reliable services in Reading.
- Technology can play a huge part in making taxis and PHVs more accessible to people with the introduction of apps, cashless pay systems and enabling ride sharing.
- The Council are also responsible for providing and maintaining suitable taxi ranks and pick-up points and will continue to liaise with operators to maintain adequate and appropriately located facilities across Reading. The Council will continue to support a shift towards electric taxis and will work with taxi and private hire service operators to identify ways in which we can support fleet changes.

3 key objectives are set out under the strategy - Policy RTS10:

- We will work with operators to deliver smart, accessible and efficient taxi services across the Borough.
  - We will work with taxi and private hire services, offering support and incentives to encourage a shift towards the use of cleaner vehicles.
  - We will require all taxis operating in Reading to be electric or hybrid vehicles by 2028.
- 2.4 The Reading Electric Vehicle (EV) Strategy forms part of the wider Sustainable Transport, Climate Emergency Strategy and Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) policy areas that aim to address congestion, environment and air quality issues associated with transport choices. A key driver to the successful adoption of electric vehicles is the ability to adequately charge vehicles. Having comprehensive, accessible, equitable and efficient charging infrastructure is essential in enabling the rapid adoption of electric

vehicles. The scope of the strategy includes consideration of specific transport sectors including Hackney Carriages (taxis) and Private Hire Vehicles (PHVs).

- 2.5 The Council's Hackney Carriage Vehicle Emissions and Age Policy 2019 intends to improve the hackney carriage vehicle fleet by removing older vehicles, creating a safer more reliable fleet and removing more polluting vehicles which will improve local air quality within Reading. The policy aims to encourage the move to cleaner vehicles and highlight the benefits to the trade as residents and businesses demand a greener alternative transport offer.
- 2.6 The policy uses a staged approach to remove the older and more polluting vehicles whose exhaust fumes are harmful to health and detrimental to the environment. The policy was formulated in consultation with the Taxi trade following the declaration of the Climate Change Emergency. The policy has set a target that all vehicles will be minimum ULEV by 1 October 2028.
- 2.7 The Council is the Taxi Licensing Authority and has a duty to regulate the quality of service and safety standards of both taxis and PHVs. Drivers of both must be licensed. The Council seeks to promote and maintain an adequate supply and coverage of operators and vehicles across the Borough. It is also the Council's responsibility to implement taxi ranks on the public highway, reasonably close to where people want to travel from, including key interchange points with bus and rail networks. The Council has adopted a policy to not issue any additional hackney carriage vehicle licenses unless there is evidence of significant unmet demand for hackney carriage services. This is reviewed at least every three years by way of an independent unmet demand survey being conducted. Applicants for a licence are required to undertake a knowledge test and a driving assessment. Annual inspections of operators and regular checks within the town in respect of driver's licences, vehicle licences and conditions of vehicle are conducted by council enforcement officers.

### **3. The proposal**

#### **Current Position**

- 3.1. Hackney Carriages (taxis) and Private Hire Vehicles (PHVs) are an important part of Reading's integrated transport system. They are a useful, often vital component to completing journeys and may form part of a more sustainable longer distance multi modal trip or be used where no convenient alternative is available.
- 3.2. Taxis and PHVs are one of the most flexible elements of the transport system operating 24/7 on a commercial basis. In Reading, taxis and PHVs are integral to supporting local businesses to thrive by transporting residents and visitors around the Borough. The services are a primary mode of passenger transport for many people for whom mainstream public transport is not an option or suitable. Taxis and PHVs help support many disabled and vulnerable people to live more independent lives. They also play an important part in supporting the night-time economy, providing a safe and secure mode of transport for many people home.
- 3.3. A safe, modern, clean, and affordable taxi and PHV service contributes to the local economy and benefits both local residents and visitors to Reading.
- 3.4. The regulatory framework operated by the Council is underpinned through a number of policies and procedures which are subject to regular review, however there is no current overall strategy which sets out the vision for the service and recognises the role it plays in the integrated transport system. There is no statutory requirement for the council to produce a strategy.

#### **Option Proposed**

- 3.5. This proposal is to introduce an overarching strategy which clearly sets out the vision and objectives for the Taxi and Private Hire sector in Reading over the next five years,

which will steer policy development over that period. It is intended all policies will be reviewed against the strategic plan going forward.

3.6. The Council has set out 4 key objectives which underpin the basis of the strategy:

- **Customer focused:** high levels of customer service, accountable operators and drivers and a service which provides value for money.
- **Safe:** the sector is trusted; passengers are confident in using the services and vehicles are modern and accessible for all.
- **Clean:** the fleet is greener and cleaner helping to deliver services with a low environmental impact.
- **Well regulated:** the Council has an effective regulatory framework to administer and enforce statutory and local requirements, to benefit both the trade and customers.

The objectives will be achieved by:

- Regulating and developing a modern fleet of hackney carriages and private hire vehicles utilising the latest technology that is easy to book, with contactless payment and accessible for all.
- To consult and support the trade so drivers and operators can operate on a viable commercial basis and have confidence to invest in their service.
- Incentivise the uptake of Ultra Low Emission Vehicles (ULEV) and invest in charging infrastructure across the Town.
- Ensure that the Council's engagement with the taxi and PHV sector enjoys a high degree of public confidence and that regulatory interventions are targeted, proportionate and consistent.
- Being transparent and accountable with up-to date policies and procedures which ensure compliance with statutory standards.
- Enhancing the online processing of licensing applications and communications with customers.

3.7. Under the terms of the Policing and Crime Act 2017 the Department for Transport (DfT) has introduced minimum licensing standards for hackney carriages (taxis) and private hire vehicles. The standards were published in July 2020. The Council has a legal duty to have regard to the minimum standards when undertaking its taxi and private hire vehicle licensing function.

3.8. The Statutory Standards set-out a range of robust measures to protect taxi and private hire vehicle passengers, particularly those most vulnerable. Government advice is that Licensing Authorities must work to ensure that, above all else, the taxi and private hire vehicle services the public use are safe. DfT recommends all licensing authorities make publicly available a cohesive policy document that brings together all their procedures on taxi and private hire vehicle licensing.

3.9. The Council are committed to ensuring full compliance with these standards by assessing against the criteria, amending current policies and implementing an improvement action plan. As part of this the council will consider:

- Introducing a requirement for CCTV in Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles to protect both customers and drivers.
- Joint authorisations with other local authorities to aid enforcement of out-of-town vehicles.
- Data sharing protocols with respective agencies to improve the information received regarding offences.

- English comprehension tests for drivers on initial application.
- 3.10. A further report regarding Statutory Standards will be submitted to the committee separately.
- 3.11. The draft Strategy also outlines the council's position on a number of other key areas including:
- Taxi Ranks - The Council will consider in light of development within the borough and emerging town centre strategy, making phased changes to the existing ranks in consultation with the trade and to prioritise Ultra Low Emission Vehicles ranks.
  - Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles - The Council are committed to reviewing the type of hackney carriage vehicles licensed to ensure they are fully wheelchair accessible and to consider if the types of vehicles permissible on the fleet should be extended to meet these requirements.
  - App based Taxi Operations - The Council will consider new license applications which are in line with this strategy and comply with legal requirements.
  - Highways Use Benefits - The Council considers that any changes to access must not undermine bus services and reliability and, if made, should primarily support Reading licensed vehicles. Any changes would have to consider that appropriate enforcement measures and necessary time restrictions are in place to ensure both bus and taxi journey times benefit and the service to the public improves.
- 3.12 The draft Strategy sets out an action plan to demonstrate how these key objectives will be achieved.

#### **4. Contribution to strategic aims**

- 4.1. The Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Strategy will, through setting out the council's vision and objectives for the sector, contribute to the following priorities in the Corporate Plan:
- Healthy Environment - Developing Reading as a Green City with a sustainable environment and economy at the heart of the Thames Valley – reducing the emissions from the Taxi and PHV fleets will contribute to a lower carbon footprint and reduce the NOx (Nitrogen Oxides) and particulate matter in the air which is associated with poor health outcomes.
  - Thriving Communities – by ensuring the Taxi and PHV sector remains integrated into our sustainable transport network to continue to move passengers to destinations safely, contributing to the economy with low impact on the environment through cleaner vehicles.
  - Inclusive Economy - Taxis and PHVs are one of the most flexible elements of the transport system operating 24/7 on a commercial basis. They are integral to supporting local businesses to thrive by transporting residents and visitors around the Borough. The services are a primary mode of passenger transport for many people for whom mainstream public transport is not an option or suitable. Taxis and PHVs help support many disabled and vulnerable people to live more independent lives. They also play an important part in supporting the night-time economy, providing a safe and secure mode of transport for many people home.

#### **5. Environmental and climate implications**

- 5.1. Transport is the biggest greenhouse gas emitting sector in the UK accounting for around 27% of total carbon emissions. As set out in the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25, this figure is lower in Reading with transport accounting for around

20% of carbon emissions. However, significant investment in sustainable transport solutions is vital in order to respond to the Climate Emergency declared by the Council in February 2019 and to help achieve our target of a carbon neutral Reading by 2030.

- 5.2. The Climate Impact Assessment tool has been used to assess the proposal as set out within this report, resulting in an overall Net Medium Positive impact. This is due to the Strategy being focused on encouraging the introduction of less polluting vehicles and improving the electric vehicle charging infrastructure. The Council's Hackney Carriage Vehicle Emissions and Age Policy 2019 intends to improve the hackney carriage vehicle fleet by removing older more polluting vehicles, creating a safer more reliable fleet which will improve local air quality within Reading.

## **6. Community engagement**

- 6.1. The Strategy has been drafted in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport.
- 6.2. A public consultation exercise on the draft Strategy will be conducted following approval by the Licensing Committee on 13 July 2023.
- 6.3. The outline timetable for the consultation will be:
- 24 July 2023 - consultation opens.
  - 3 September 2023 – consultation ends, and outcomes considered.
  - 7 November 2023 – further report to Licensing Applications Committee to adopt the final Strategy.

## **7. Equality impact assessment**

- 7.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, a public authority must have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act,
  - Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it, and
  - Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 7.2 The Council will undertake an equality impact assessment scoping exercise on the projects included within the strategy at the appropriate stage of development.

## **8. Other relevant considerations**

- 8.1. There are no other relevant considerations.

## **9. Legal implications**

- 9.1. The Taxi Strategy is an overarching document setting out the role of the Licensing Authority and how the council will apply its policies. Legal implications for each of those policies will be considered as they are reviewed.

## **10. Financial implications**

- 10.1. There are no direct financial implications of the strategy for the Council. Where detailed aspects of the strategy, as they are introduced, result in additional costs as part of the licensing process, this will be reflected in the fees charged. Higher fares could result where operators and drivers costs increase. Any changes to the fees or fares are required to be approved through the committee process.

## **11. Timetable for implementation**

11.1. The draft Strategy is for a five-year period, 2023-2028. The Strategy sets out the key actions and timescales in an action plan.

## **12. Background papers**

12.1. There are none.

## **Appendices**

1. Draft Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Strategy 2023-2028